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ABSTRACT

Northern Michigan University and the Marquette Area Public Schools are working collaboratively to improve both K-12 education and teacher education. Through several cooperative ventures, students and teachers in both institutions are benefitting from increased professional collaboration, becoming allies to reform and renew education. The main focus of the effort centers on several field experiences for university students in area schools. This paper describes the collaboration at two public schools. The field experiences are designed so that all parties involved benefit. Collaborative teams, including university faculty, school district staff, local education agency staff, parents, and university students, address the specific focus of each school. Elements of the collaboration include creating formative self-evaluation and team/school improvement plans, completing a teaming self-assessment instrument, and documenting the teaming process across multiple dimensions. An essential outcome of the project is the development of new knowledge to be integrated into teacher preparation and inservice teacher education. The project plans to develop and field test a curriculum module that will allow teacher education faculty and personnel development professionals to incorporate training on collaborative teaming into their respective education programs. Formative and summative evaluation of the project will be done by the project evaluation consultant and monitored by the project management team. The evaluation design will be based on the principles of participatory action research. (Contains 9 references.) (SM)

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An Upper Peninsula Collaborative Site of Practice and Inquiry

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An Upper Peninsula Collaborative Site of Practice and Inquiry

Rodney Clarken and Barbara LeRoy

University and K-12 teachers suffer from lack of time, help, collaboration and cooperation. These limit their efforts to help our young people grow, develop and learn. Teacher education students often feel they are not well prepared for the real world of teaching. Northern Michigan University and the Marquette Area Public Schools are addressing these concerns by working together to improve both K-12 education and teacher education. Through several cooperative ventures, students and teachers in both institutions are benefitting from the increased professional collaboration. They have become allies to reform and renew education. They are redefining the ways that schools and institutions of higher learning interact with one another to improve education for both of their students.

The main focus of this reform effort has centered on several field experiences that university students have in area schools. These experiences have been developed to help prepare teacher education students apply what they are learning in the University to the real world of practice and to help area youth get more assistance in their learning. These experiences with K-12 students, classrooms, and schools help preservice teachers better understand teaching and practice teaching effectively. Students in teacher education spend time in classrooms assisting teachers and children with school work, observing how discipline is maintained, teachers teach, and students learn. They develop insights into the roles of schools and teachers. They begin to understand the complex nature of teaching, learning, and classroom management and the part culture plays in education.

Reform efforts have not dramatically changed the nature of schools for several interrelated reasons (e.g., Senge, 1990; Goodlad, 1990; and Sizer, 1993; Garmston and Wellman, 1995). They have failed to adopt a holistic focus of schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1990; Goodlad, 1990). Learning organizations are continually enhancing their capacity to create success for all students (O'Neill, 1995) through the learning of school employees and improvements in their capacity to solve problems. Renewal of individual competencies and collective competencies is central to school based reform (Goodlad, 1990; Brandt, 1991).

Learning organizations are results driven, systems oriented and constructivist (Sparks, 1994). Success is measured by how alterations in organizational and instructional behavior benefit *all* students; the interrelationships and interdependency of all members of the system contribute to the health and growth of the organization; and the focus is on a team approach to understanding the learning process from each member's and the collective unit's contexts.

Based on a comprehensive multiyear study of over 1,800 schools and teacher preparation programs, Goodlad (1990) concluded that education reform must be based on an equal partnership between schools and universities allowing practicing teachers to work with preservice teachers on a consistent and long term basis. Reform efforts fail for lack of these collaborative opportunities for new learning to occur and sustained support for experimentation and reflection.

This paper describes the work completed thus far at one site, shares the research questions agreed upon by all parties and explores the structure, capacity and human resources of the project and its participants. This is the second year of this ongoing project studying teaming with the purpose of doing a comprehensive research study within a unified education system for practicing and preservice general and special education teachers. The study population, sample, variability; the data validity, reliability and analysis and the methodology are briefly discussed. Questions and concerns of the project members are presented.

This project is conceptually based on a learning organization model of collaborative personnel preparation. Project objectives for the second year are (a) to identify elements of multidimensional, collaborative teaming and to describe its process; (b) to develop a teaming curriculum module for preservice and inservice training; and (c) to disseminate learnings. This paper describes the collaboration process at the Whitman Elementary School (Marquette Public

Schools)/Northern Michigan University Department of Education site with an overview of the conceptual model; a summary of the first year's activities; a workplan delineating the second year's objectives and activities; a timeline; and a management plan including a person loading chart.

Background Information

Northern Michigan University (NMU) and Whitman Elementary School (WES) are in Marquette, a community of 22,000 residents. They have a rich and well-established history of partnerships for both preservice and inservice personnel preparation. The teacher preparation program is premised on the belief that teacher preparation and teacher ongoing development are intimately linked and must be provided simultaneously to foster quality schools and professionals.

Good working relations are necessary if Northern is to place hundreds of teacher education students in thousands of practica and student teaching placements, play a leadership role in K-12 education, be the university of choice for graduate course work by area teachers and be viewed as a valuable resource by educators, parents and students. At one time, NMU's image suffered, relationships were frayed, and problems existed that impacted on our student teaching and field experiences programs. The Director of Laboratory Field Experiences (DLFE) has worked for several years in trying to bring about a positive change in the working relationships between the NMU Department of Education and area K-12 educators, by personally visiting and communicating with university personnel, principals and classroom teachers to address problems or concerns in a prompt, responsible and effective manner, which not only has greatly improved relations, but also improved the education program.

The Director works with professors and teachers to make field experiences more integrated into the courses and the program. By developing a closer relationship between the course and the field experience, and developing closer relatioas with the teachers with whom Northern places students, NMU has improved its teacher education program. This relationship depends on finding good teachers who are willing to accept preservice teachers, and then supporting them and helping them as needed to supervise NMU students. This is a delicate process as perception about the responsibilities and qualities of teachers differs from professional to professional. Placements each term are improving and are more frequently with outstanding teachers in schools that have good relations with NMU.

Northern's field experiences are designed so that all parties involved benefit from the experience. Not only should the teacher education student learn from the experience, but the classroom teachers and their students should benefit from NMU students being in their classroom. NMU preservice teacher education students are significantly influenced by and highly value their opportunity to get firsthand classroom experiences. These experiences provide a balanced blend of theory and practice. The sequencing of the field experiences moves from knowledge to practice, from simple to more complex activities and from limited duties to full assumptions of teaching duties. In the pre-methods field experiences, students observe and study the school as an institution and work in classrooms with children to better understand them and develop a personal understanding of schools and teachers' functions and duties. This understanding is accomplished through visits to schools and assisting in teaching duties.

At the methods level of Northern's program, students learn about effective planning and teaching, then plan instruction and teach individual students, small groups and whole classes in area schools. This process helps students not only understand, but apply their knowledge of teaching. It is a time to reflect on the teaching process and profession and become committed to that profession.

Student teaching is the culmination of these experiences as it requires the student teachers to assume and effectively carry out all the duties and responsibilities of a teacher. The process of revising and improving teaching based on new knowledge, skills, needs and dispositions, largely as the result of ongoing collaboration, is to continue throughout the teaching career.

Whitman Elementary School allocates a classroom so that NMU courses can be taught

on site. NMU students combine university instruction with guided practice in Whitman classrooms. NMU professor of language arts and reading, Dr Suzanne Standerford, and her students work closely with the staff of Whitman. Whitman Elementary School is an inclusive school, in that all students are educated within the regular classroom and supports are provided within those classrooms. The focus of the collaborative teams at Whitman is the logistical, curricular and instructional design of thematic instruction, as a vehicle for improving student outcomes.

Planning for Collaboration

This project, Upper Peninsula Collaborative Site of Practice and Inquiry (UPCSPI), had a planning year co-directed by Dr. June Schaefer, Superintendent of MAISD, and Dr. Jim Hendricks, Head of NMU Department of Education. The Project Steering Committee, composed of representatives of all participating organizations (MAISD, NMU, Marquette Area Schools and community, NICE Community Schools and community, and the Project Evaluator), was responsible for planning and addressing issues involved with implementation of the project. The activities undertaken in the first year are summarized below:

1. Established a steering committee, composed of project partners and community liaisons, to provide leadership, oversight, and management of the project, and subcommittees to study and make recommendations related to the logistics of the implementation plan.

2. Established teaming as the area of study. A team of university faculty, intermediate school district (ISD) staff, local education agency (LEA) staff, parents, and university students was established to design the implementation plan for year two. Research questions were developed through a series of project staff retreats and then were submitted to a process of review and refinement based on a review of the literature. Field visits to exemplary programs which embrace schools as learning organizations and successful teacher teaming models, and expert conversations on teaming were held. A refined list of six consensus questions was developed and a field survey to 156 education experts implemented to determine the relevance of the proposed consensus questions to teacher preservice preparation, school improvement, inservice staff development, and student learning outcomes. Findings from the survey assisted the inquiry design team in the development of the implementation plan, including its methods and procedures. (See the Appendix for a list of the consensus questions and the results of the field survey).

3. Through a series of ongoing meetings, Whitman Elementary (Marquette Area Public Schools) and Aspen Ridge Middle School (NICE Community Schools) were fully developed as the collaborative sites of this project. These sites were chosen because they represent two very different contextual settings for carrying out the project.

Based on the above activities, an implementation plan was drafted, reviewed, and refined into the proposed workplan which included project objectives, activities, timelines, and project management plan including unit and personnel responsibilities for the second year.

Elements and Process of Collaboration

As the collaborative teams in each implementation site worked together to address each teams specific focus (i.e., Whitman: multiage models; Aspen Ridge: language arts and reading), the teams carried out a formative, reflective process to identify elements of collaborative teaming and to describe the process of that teaming. That formative and reflective process was done with teams across the horizontal (i.e., teacher teams, student teams, IHE teams) and vertical dimensions (teams across different groups) of the school. They were guided by the research questions developed in first year of this project. Specific activities related to Whitman include the following:

1. Formative Self Assessment and Team/School Improvement Plan. Whitman first identified a critical team of internal and external educators and stakeholders to oversee and assist in the implementation of its self assessment and plan. The team consisted of the Director of Field Experiences at NMU (Rodney Clarken) and of the following Whitman School staff: the principal

(Joe Meyskens), the Title 1 teacher (Marjean Bartelle), the pre-K speech and language impaired (SLI) teacher (Tami Bott), a first grade teacher (Lucy Harrington), and a fourth grade teacher (Rachel Evans). In February, the fourth grade teacher opted out of the team because of other responsibilities.

Through a series of retreats and meetings during school, after school and in the evenings, the Whitman, NMU, and Marquette-Alger Intermediate Schools (MAISD) staff, along with parents and community members assessed themselves and consulted about a team/school improvement plan. After several meetings of the critical team, it was decided to focus on thematic teaching as the area of school improvement. Based on the self assessment, the group had moved from a focus on multiage in the planning year to a focus on thematic instruction in the later part of the second year. The collaborative grant tentative budget in the appendices outlines some activities planned.

The critical friend/consultant/coordinator for Whitman (Rodney Clarken) was responsible for stretching that teams improvement by instigating powerful questions related to the discrepant elements found between the essential teaming elements and the existing practice. The team is to revisit its self assessment quarterly to evaluate its progress toward a deeper understanding and realization of its school as a collaborative learning organization. Ongoing self assessment also may assist the project staff in the eventual development of a the teaming instrument.

2. Teaming Self Assessment Instrument. A significant outcome of this year of implementation research is the development of a Teaming Self Assessment Instrument. Based on the knowledge gained from the site self assessments, the instrument is to delineate essential elements of collaborative teaming, indicators of the existence of each element within the school context, and an interval scale for rating personal and team coherence to each element.

A teaming self assessment instrument was designed by the Director of Field Experiences using the research questions developed in the planning phase (see Appendix 1). This instrument was shared across all teams. The Whitman team felt that the instrument did not get at the issues they were dealing with and that its terms were hard to define. After some reworking, the project evaluator (Barbara LeRoy) recommended a different form that had used in her office (see Appendix 2). The Whitman team also found this instrument not well suited to the types of activities they have been involved in. As of yet, no instrument has been field tested across the horizontal and vertical teams to identify and assess the teaming elements identified in the consensus questions from Year One: community involvement; school culture; team structure and organization; role identification; team and individual self reflection; and professional growth. (See the Appendix for a delineation of the Consensus Questions as compared to these essential teaming elements.) The instrument is yet to be tested in a variety of settings to assure its face and content validity and internal and external reliability. The project evaluator will assist the project co-coordinators in testing the validity and reliability of the instrument.

3. Documentation of the teaming process across multiple dimensions. The critical friend is to maintain a log of the collaborative teaming process to document each team's development. Contents of the log are to include: a list of the powerful questions (instigating probes) for each essential teaming element; team development strategies; strategy related outcomes; barriers to and facilitators of change; reflections on team dynamics and member roles; and preservice/inservice linkages. The Collaborative Teaming Process Log was developed for this process (see appendix), but discontinued after trying it because it did not get at the teaming process activities used by the team at Whitman. Complimenting the critical friend/consultant logs are quarterly interview/survey data from the team members, which were collected by the project evaluator. This documentation and its analysis will assist in the development of a curriculum module.

Teaming Process at Whitman and Northern

Teaming between Northern Michigan University and area schools assists preservice teachers move from observation of students and classroom activities to full assumption of the role of the teacher. These experiences begin in the first education course and progress through student

teaching giving students opportunities to observe, plan and practice in a variety of settings appropriate to the professional roles for which they are being prepared. Four basic criteria are considered when making placements: a) the student's program; b) the quality of the school, classroom and teacher; c) the willingness of the cooperating teacher to participate in the program; and d) the student's schedule. Students are normally placed in the Marquette Area Public Schools. The procedure for placing Northern Michigan University students in the Marquette Public Schools is outlined in an agreement between NMU and the Marquette School District.

Examples of development of the teaming process across the horizontal and vertical dimensions related to Whitman and NMU are described below:

1. Whitman Teams. Teacher teams function on various levels at Whitman. The whole school functions as a team and other collaborative arrangements exist among different staff members. The SLI and kindergarten teachers have combined their classes and jointly team teach their students. This is a more daunting task as the SLI class instructors are each half-time teachers working with a full time kindergarten teacher. The SLI children come all day every day while the kindergarten students come two full days and half Fridays. The SLI teachers also have a half time student teacher who has been teaching with the for two whole university semesters. As an inclusive school, the special education teacher and regular education teachers work closely together. The two teachers at each grade level collaborate on their teaching. There are regular monthly cross grade level meetings so that the teachers can talk with the teachers at the other grade levels. Half the teachers meet in the morning and the other half meet in the afternoon while substitute teachers cover their classrooms. Some special days, like International Day or AIMS Day have all of the teachers working with all of the students. The support staff is very involved in the collaboration, instruction and planning.

2. NMU Student Teams. Elementary methods classes are in a block schedule so students can combine the content of these courses and collaborate with each other. In the late 1980's, ED 311 Language Arts Methods & Materials and 316 Elementary Reading Instruction I were taught together by one instructor as a unified course. In 1994, the students in these joined classes were required to take ED 310 Social Studies Methods and Material for Elementary Teachers concurrently. The two professors of these courses worked together to interrelate the content taught. In 1997, ED 361 Special Education for the General Classroom Teacher and ED 483 Educational Media were added to create an integrated block of methods courses to connect the subject matter, help students see the connections, model collaborative teaching, apply content across subjects and share a field experience (Standerford, 1997, p. 1).

The students taking these classes as a cohort group have been very enthusiastic about the benefits of their collaboration on improved learning. The students are also learning that collaboration and working in teams is a natural and valuable part of teaching.

3. NMU Faculty Teams. The DLFE collaborates with all of the professors teaching in the phase I classes, and the teachers in the field with whom NMU students are placed. The professors for the phase I block of elementary methods, ED 311/316/310/361 and 483, collaborate together and jointly conduct some class sessions. Evaluations by the professor and students have been positive. Students appreciate the modeling of collaboration by the professors. They continue to work together to improve the coordination of assignments and the integration of concepts (Standerford, 1997, p. 1). This approach has been so successful that is has been expanded so that the second set of methods course is also now offered in a block schedule with the professors teaming on how to best accomplish their goals.

4. NMU/Whitman Teams. The Director of Laboratory Field Experiences serves as the critical friend/consultant/coordinator for the CSPI project at Whitman. Two NMU methods courses are currently taught in Whitman school with field experiences in its classrooms. Supervision and feedback are facilitated by both the classroom teacher and the professor being in an authentic classroom setting. The elementary block scheduled courses have had one of their classes and their field experience in Whitman elementary school to bring theory and practice together through real

experiences teaching language arts. The teachers in Whitman have been oriented to the expectations of NMU's program and are cooperating to achieve its objectives. Dr. Standerford has developed a very close relationship with the teachers after several years of collaborating with them on different professional activities, such as the writing project and state standards. Students prepare and teach lessons in the field placements under the supervision of the classroom teacher and the university professor. Students spend three hours a week in the classroom, about 20 to 30 hours during the term.

Students in the second phase of methods also have ten hours of field experience at Whitman in ED 312 Science Methods and Materials for Elementary Teachers. They also have an additional ten hours experience in a middle school science classroom, and another four hours in related science teaching activities.

5. Across Team Collaboration. DLFE has been actively involved and collaborated in many professional activities with professionals in our university, in education and in the community. NMU teacher education field experiences are supervised by the classroom teacher, the course instructor, and the Director of Laboratory Field Experiences. The evaluation of the preservice teachers competencies in field settings is the primary responsibility of the supervising teachers. As all field experiences are integral parts of a course, the professor can monitor the student's field experience and provide the supervision and feedback needed.

NMU students spend many hours collaborating with Whitman teachers. These experiences help them to become better teachers. They also help students in the schools, teachers and the community. This symbiotic relationship is one in which everyone wins and benefits. Through continued collaborative efforts like these, the university, public schools and communities become partners in providing excellent education and allies to improve educational opportunity for this region's youth.

Teaming Curriculum Module

An essential outcome from this project is the development of new knowledge to be integrated into teacher preparation and ongoing teacher education activities. It is expected that the learnings that will occur as the result of the above activities will be processed into readily accessible materials that can be incorporated into existing higher education teacher (preservice) preparation courses and practica, and personnel development (inservice) workshops and seminars. To facilitate this process the following specific activities related to this objective will occur:

1. Curriculum Module Development. A curriculum module will be developed which will allow teacher education faculty and personnel development professionals to incorporate training on collaborative teaming into their respective education programs. This module will provide lecture materials, activities, instruments, and evaluation forms on teacher teaming within the context of a unified educational system. Specific content will include:

(a) Overview materials on collaborative teaming, unified (inclusive) schools, unified preservice and inservice teacher preparation. These materials will address philosophy, processes, and research outcomes.

(b) The Teaming Self Assessment Instrument with instructions for use, interpretation, and incorporation into a formative school improvement process.

(c) Collaborative Teaming Facilitation Guide with powerful questions/instigating probes, team development strategies, delineation of barrier removal strategies, and learning opportunities. This guide will be generated from the teaming process logs.

(d) A Checklist for determining university/community school readiness for collaborative teacher preservice and inservice preparation.

(e) An annotated bibliography on collaborative teaming and unified teacher preparation.

Content for this Curriculum Module will be gathered during the first nine months of this second Year of the Project through the collaborative work of the project co-coordinators, site based

team members, and the Project Evaluator. The actual Module will be drafted during months 10 and 11 of Year Two.

2. Curriculum Module Field Test and Refinement. Following the first draft of the Curriculum Module two field tests of the Modules content will be undertaken. Each field test will take one day to implement. Higher education teacher preparation faculty representatives and personnel development professionals from Michigan ISDs and LEAs will be invited to participate in the field tests. During that field test, the participants will become familiar with the content of the Module and they will be trained on how to use the Module in their respective education programs. They will be asked systematically to critique each component of the module as to content relevance, content accessibility, anticipated content effectiveness and innovation. The formats for the Module critiques will be developed collaboratively between the project staff and the project evaluator. Written and verbal critiques of the Module content will be analyzed and incorporated into the refinements of the Module by the project staff. It is anticipated that the field tests will occur in month 12 of Year Two.

Project Evaluation

The formative and summative evaluations of the project will be done by the Project Evaluation Consultant and monitored by the Project Management Team. The evaluation design will be based on the principles of participatory action research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), in which project participants assist the evaluator in the continuous description, monitoring, and modification of all aspects of the project to ensure that the project activities are facilitating stated objectives and the project goal. Based on quarterly reviews, project activities and objectives will be refined. The quarterly reviews will address such questions as:

1. To what extent is the project functioning as planned?
2. Have adjustments been made to the project? If yes, what are the adjustments and what is the impact of those adjustments?
3. What are the critical activities and characteristics of the project?
4. Are the project timelines being met?
5. Are products developed and disseminated as planned?
6. Are project activities addressing the target audiences?

Data collection sources for these quarterly reviews will include minutes and agendas from the project Management Team, the logs from site team interventions, and interviews by the Project Evaluator with key informants.

The summative evaluation will detail outcomes and the relationship of the outcomes to the objectives. The summative evaluation will be conducted by the project evaluator on an annual basis, addressing such questions as:

1. Did the project activities lead to the achievement of the goal and objectives?
2. What aspects of the project were unique and enhanced the implementation plan?
3. Was the implementation process effective for students, site staff, and university participants, i.e., was it needs satisfying; skill enhancing?
4. What was the impact of the implementation process on students, site staff, and university participants?
5. What was the cost of the project?
6. Were the proposed products developed and effective?
7. What was the impact of the curriculum module on workshop participants?
8. Was the project disseminated through a variety of sources?
9. Were the required reports relevant, accessible, and useful?

Data collection sources for the summative evaluation will include surveys, questionnaires, and interviews administered to project participants at all levels. The summative evaluation will provide information necessary for project accountability and replication.

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